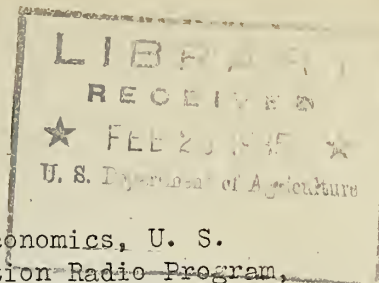


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BUYING FABRICS INTELLIGENTLY



A radio talk by Miss Ruth O'Brien, Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture, delivered in the Home Demonstration Radio Program, February 6, 1935 and broadcast by a network of 48 associate NBC radio stations.

Mrs. Thompson has told us how planning helps to keep a family well dressed. Planning is always the first step. The next is buying--buying either piece goods or some ready-made garment. And this always presents difficulties. We all try to spend our money wisely. But I expect most of us have had the experience of purchasing a fabric or garment and then seeing it shrink or fade in the first wash. Or perhaps fall to pieces very soon. It was an expensive buy, even if we didn't pay much for it. And often these mistakes are real tragedies.

The only way I can suggest to avoid them is, first, don't buy unless the fabric or garment has a label which gives you definite information about the qualities of the material. Second, read that label very, very carefully and be sure you understand just what it says. Don't think it says something it really doesn't. Of course it is up to us to study and learn all we can about textiles--how to tell one kind of fiber from another; the properties of the different fibers--what each of them is good for; the kinds of flaws which occur in fabrics and how these affect wearing qualities; the types of material to avoid if we want real service.

All of this information helps us a lot but it does not completely turn the trick. Many of the qualities of fabrics are so hidden nowadays that our simple tests do not show much. Clerks can know little more than we do. They cannot buy and wear each fabric to test it and they are usually as bewildered by all the new, unknown kinds as we are. If the store does not have the services of a testing laboratory, even the store buyers have no opportunity for getting definite facts concerning the real serviceability of the materials they buy.

I heard last week of a good example of this. A manufacturer complained bitterly because he overheard a clerk tell a customer that the store never guaranteed a certain type of fabric as "washable." As it happened this manufacturer had spent considerable money developing a washable finish for the very fabric she was showing. In this way it was different from all the rest of this type of fabrics and he was very proud of his achievement. Of course when he saw the clerk show the customer his pet product and then say it was not washable, he was more than hurt and grieved. He was downright mad and had harsh things to say about the intelligence of store people in general and this clerk in particular.

But, when I heard this sad story, I said to myself. "It is his own fault. He should have placed a label on the bolt of material so that the store buyer, the clerk, the customer, and everybody else could read about this new finish and learn right away that this particular fabric would wash."

A customer has a right to definite information. She should find labels on every fabric and garment telling how well it will wear; whether or

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not the color is fast to washing and to sunlight; exactly how much it will shrink; the best way to clean and care for it. In fact, everything she needs to know in order to decide which one will best satisfy the need she is trying to fill by that purchase. All of this should be written out as clearly and definitely as the price.

More and more such labels are appearing on goods. In the Bureau of Home Economics we recently made a study of the labels attached to ready-made clothing. While we noticed that many of these were indefinite and a few were decidedly misleading, many were very helpful. The trend today is undoubtedly toward more and better labels. As a wide-awake consumer you should encourage the practice. And how can you do this? One very effective way is to always look for such sources of definite information and then use them as guides to more intelligent purchasing.

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